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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0596
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0282
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0630
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2596
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1975
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000670

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL KG

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PROTEST AGAINST BASE, AS LAWMAKERS SEEK
EMBASSY SUPPORT

REF: A. BISHKEK 665

1B. BISHKEK 632

1C. BISHKEK 614

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This cable contains an action request. Please see
paragraph 8.

12. (C) SUMMARY: On June 2, 35-40 demonstrators gathered in front of the Embassy to protest Manas Airbase's continued presence in Kyrgyzstan. Led by the "Movement for the Withdrawal of the U.S. Air Force Base," the demonstrators called for the immediate removal of the base and promised to gather 300,000 signatures to initiate a public referendum on the base. On June 1, the Ambassador met separately with MPs Iskhak Masaliyev and Melis Eshimkanov to discuss the base. Masaliyev said he continued to oppose the base "on principle," but doubted there were enough votes in parliament to adopt his suggestion that the base agreement be cancelled.

He said parliamentarians would be reluctant to forgo the lucrative contracts associated with the base or to go against other Coalition members. Eshimkanov, who now supports the base, asked for additional points to use in any subsequent parliamentary hearings on the base. We believe that it would be useful if Coalition partners could help impress upon the Kyrgyz the shared concerns about security in Afghanistan and the continuing need to maintain the base. In addition, helping the Kyrgyz compete for contracts in Afghanistan through a contracting seminar would also boost support for the base. END SUMMARY.

BASE PROTEST: CALM, BUT DETERMINED

13. (SBU) On Saturday, June 2, 35-40 demonstrators gathered for about an hour in front of the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek to call for the Manas Airbase's immediate removal. Organized by the "Movement for the Withdrawal of the U.S Air Force Base," the pro-government Liberal Progressive Party, the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, and the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, the protestors chanted "Yankee go home," held banners that read "No to the Airbase," and listed their base-related demands. In addition to calling for the base's removal, the protestors demanded the extradition of Airman Hatfield, an environmental survey of the area surrounding the base, an investigation into all other base-related incidents, and revision of the agreement to remove all immunities currently afforded to military personnel at Manas. The head of the "Movement," Alexander Tiperov, promised to gather 300,000 signatures to initiate a public referendum on the base's continued presence.

MP MASALIYEV: PRINCIPLES AFFECTING POSITION

14. (C) The Ambassador met with pro-government MP Iskhak Masaliyev June 1 to discuss his position on the base, and to confirm his participation in a USG-sponsored trip to Afghanistan June 13-14 (ref A). Masaliyev, who spoke out against the base during parliamentary committee hearing on May 23 (ref C), thought that additional hearings on the base were likely, but would probably have to wait until Parliament reconvenes in the fall, due to the heavy workload until parliament recesses at the end of June. He said that it was unlikely that his suggestions that the base agreement be cancelled would be accepted by the parliamentarians. He cited lucrative contracts, the coalition nature of the base,

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as well as Russia's recent SOFA agreement with NATO as reasons the deputies would, in the end, support the base. Masaliyev said he had counted up the votes, and there were not enough for his view to prevail.

15. (C) Masaliyev, the head of the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, said that his opposition to the base was determined by his responsibilities to his party and his constituents. He said his party believed that the base was not beneficial for Kyrgyzstan, despite the economic advantages. He said he understood the base's economic and political worth to Kyrgyzstan, but the series of base-related incidents, including Alexander Ivanov's death, (unspecified) road accidents, and ecological concerns, had fueled conservative opinion against the base. He welcomed the chance to join other Kyrgyz officials on a trip to Afghanistan to get a first-hand view of the security situation, and he backed the suggestion that the Ambassador speak with members of Masaliyev's party to address their concerns about the base. He noted that the Kyrgyz White House has been relatively silent on this issue, as has Russia, implying that such silence made it harder for him to speak out in support of the base.

MP ESHIMKANOV: HELP ME HELP YOU

16. (C) In a separate meeting June 1, MP Melis Eshimkanov, who had just accepted an appointment as Kyrgyz Ambassador to Switzerland, told the Ambassador 1 that he understood the base was important to Kyrgyzstan's security and economy. Contrary to MP Masaliyev's earlier prediction, Eshimkanov believed base hearings could resume in parliament as early as June 4 or 5. (Comment: We believe this is highly unlikely. End Comment.) Presenting himself as pro-American and pro-base, the mercurial Eshimkanov asked for additional talking points to use in subsequent parliamentary hearings on the base. The Ambassador said that she is always available to field any questions he may have about the base.

Eshimkanov said that he relayed these views to President Bakiyev, who agreed that the base serves Kyrgyzstan's interests. Eshimkanov claimed he told Bakiyev that if Manas Airbase goes, Russia's base in Kant would also need to go -- to which he said Bakiyev agreed. Eshimkanov said Bakiyev blessed Eshimkanov's initiative to defend the base.

(Comment: We believe that it is likely that the ever-opportunistic Eshimkanov was probably told to defend the base now that he is on the President's team. End Comment.)

COMMENT

17. (C) The anti-base protest June 2 at the embassy concluded without incident. The event drew only 35-40 supporters, but the organizers have vowed to stage additional demonstrations, including at the Manas Air Base June 4 when Defense Secretary Gates will be in town. It seems that Chief of Staff Medet Sadyrkulov's "pep talk" to key actors in government and parliament, following the May 23 parliamentary committee session (ref B), may be paying dividends, as Masaliyev, who has consistently opposed the base, appeared to be softening his position. Likewise, Eshimkanov, who had been extremely critical of Base and American handling of the Metzger case, the collision, and the shooting incident, has all of a sudden become our staunch defender. We believe that the June 13-14 trip to Afghanistan for Kyrgyz officials and additional tours of the base for all parliamentarians at the end of June will help impress upon the Kyrgyz the shared concerns about

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security in Afghanistan and the continuing need to maintain the base. END COMMENT.

18. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post seeks Department's assistance in persuading Coalition partner to engage with the Kyrgyz to make the case about the shared interests in security and stability in Afghanistan and the continuing need to maintain Manas Air Base. Post also seeks the Department's assistance in arranging for USG contracting specialists to come to conduct a seminar for Kyrgyz businesses to help them to compete for contracts in Afghanistan. Both actions would help boost support for the base.

YOVANOVITCH